

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

On November 2, 2007, the Kawishiwi Ranger District of the Superior National Forest filed a Notice of Intent to prepare the Glacier Project Environmental Impact Statement (Federal Register: Vol. 67, No. 92, pp 32007-32008). The proposed management activities within the Glacier Project Area include vegetation management activities to create young forest and improve stand conditions through timber harvest, removal of unwanted vegetation, planting desired species, and prescribed burning. Additional actions include managing the road system and gravel pits, improving watersheds, maintaining wildlife habitat, and developing recreational opportunities.

This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared by an interdisciplinary planning team of resource specialists to inform the decision-maker (the Kawishiwi District Ranger) and the public about the various levels of management activities, called alternatives, which could be implemented within the Project Area. The three alternatives considered in detail and the alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail in this Draft EIS provide a well-distributed range of management options, including the option of conducting no additional management activities within the Project Area. The Draft EIS discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects, as well as any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources, which would result from implementing each alternative.

The public and to state and federal agencies are invited to provide comments on the alternatives and analyses included in the Draft EIS. Comments received on the Draft EIS will be incorporated into a Final EIS. The decision made will be based on the Final EIS and will be documented in the Record of Decision.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Purpose and Need for a project is arrived at by examining the differences between the existing condition and the desired condition. The desired condition is determined using guidance from the Forest Plan, federal and state laws and regulations, and from the issues and concerns expressed by the public through the scoping process.

The purpose of the Glacier Project is to maintain and promote native vegetation communities that are diverse, productive, healthy, and resilient by moving the vegetation component toward Landscape Ecosystem objectives described in the 2004 Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan p. 2-23, O-VG-1). There is a need to manage the amount, distribution and characteristics of vegetation so that it is more representative of the historical range of natural

variability. (Forest Plan, D-VG-3, page 2-22) The associated transportation system (including gravel pits) needed for long-term vegetation management in the Project Area is also addressed.

While developing the Proposed Action, the interdisciplinary team collaborated with and reviewed data from the State of Minnesota, Lake and St. Louis Counties, and Tribal representatives. The primary reasons for collaboration were to try to design similar forest management activities that would occur across ownership boundaries. The interdisciplinary team also proposed road management activities that would meet the multiple needs of land owners and forest visitors.

A. Purpose and Need for Managing Vegetation

The interdisciplinary team of resource specialists identified a need to move the Project Area's vegetation towards the Forest Plan's desired conditions for soil, wildlife habitat, scenery, fuels reduction, and aquatic habitat enhancement. This section provides a brief description of these resources along with vegetation management opportunities in the Glacier Project Area. The interdisciplinary team of resource specialists integrated the opportunities to develop a Proposed Action that contributes to the overall need to manage vegetation.

The current vegetation component in the Glacier Project Area does not meet the Forest Plan desired conditions for species composition, age class, tree species diversity, and management indicator habitats for Landscape Ecosystems. The differences between the existing and desired conditions were used to develop the purpose and need for this Project. The interdisciplinary team of resource specialists addressed the following opportunities while developing the Proposed Action.

In particular, this project would:

- Maintain existing patches of mature forest greater than 300 acres that would not lose interior forest qualities during the next ten years. Some harvest is planned around the edges of some large patches to reduce fragmentation and some intermediate harvest (such as thinning or variable thinning) would occur but would not eliminate the interior forest qualities. In addition, forest that would grow into a 300-acre mature patch within ten years was also considered as a mature patch. These patches would provide interior forest habitat for species needing larger tracts of mature forest such as boreal owl, goshawk, and lynx.
- Create one 300-plus-acre patch of young of forest by harvesting a mature patch that does not maintain interior forest characteristics in ten years. Forest successional modeling shows that this patch would succeed to a pole-aged spruce-fir forest and would not have a closed canopy or interior forest conditions. Regenerating this patch at this time would allow it to maintain patch characteristics, although at a younger age. Collaborative efforts between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Forest Service would result in a large patch of young forest.
- Reduce fragmentation by proposing regeneration harvests adjacent to existing young stands, including those proposed to be harvested on other ownership.
- Maintain and improve habitat needed for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. The Project would defer management action in some stands to maintain habitat for some species such as boreal owl, goshawk, and rare plants. And proposes management action in other areas

to create or enhance habitat, such as riparian management and planting of white pine for future bald eagle nesting habitat, enhancing wolf and lynx habitat by limiting new roads open for public use and creating young forest for prey species such as deer and snowshoe hare.

- Maintain nesting and foraging habitat within the known goshawk territory.
- Create and maintain conifer habitat for three-toed woodpecker and olive-sided flycatcher.
- Maintain stands that currently provide thermal cover, and increases the amount of conifer in other stands in the Garden Lake Deer Yard.

PROPOSED ACTION

The interdisciplinary team developed a proposed action that was included in the Glacier Project Scoping Report. This Proposed Action follows the Forest Plan objectives for Landscape Ecosystem and Management Area goals and objectives and incorporates the Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Forest Plan direction provides a framework with which to manage vegetation by considering multiple-use and other resource desired conditions. In developing the original Proposed Action for the Scoping Report, the Team considered the existing condition for age class, species composition, and Management Indicator Habitats in each of the Landscape Ecosystems, both in the Project Area and across the forest. This forest-wide vegetation information showed there was an opportunity to create conditions that would move the vegetation towards the desired conditions outlined in the Forest Plan. The Team identified possible management actions that would move the area towards the desired conditions. In addition, the Team considered Forest Plan direction for other resources in developing the proposed action, such as protecting and, where appropriate, enhancing wildlife habitat, watershed health, soil resources, scenic integrity, riparian habitat, and heritage resources.

Proposed activities include:

- Creating young forest with final harvests
- Improving stand structure and within-stand diversity with intermediate harvests
- Restoring stand conditions without harvest, such as:
 - Planting long-lived tree species to enhance scenery and aquatic habitat
 - Conducting prescribed burns to reduce the future risk of wildfire

Managing the minimum road system needed for long-term vegetation management

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

An issue is a point of debate, dispute, or disagreement with the anticipated effects of a proposed action. Significant issues are those that are used to develop alternative methods of meeting the Project's purpose and need. The following are the significant issues and indicators the District Ranger decided will be used to develop alternatives for this project. These significant issues are based on the comments the public submitted on the Glacier Project Scoping Report Proposed Action. The indicators that will be used to disclose the effects of each significant issue are also included. Additional information on each of these issues can be found in Chapter 3.

Vegetation management adjacent to the BWCAW

The public raised a concern that vegetation management and associated roads would negatively affect wilderness qualities, the visitor's experience, and the ecological integrity of the BWCAW.

Lynx

The public expressed concern that harvest and associated road activities have the potential to affect lynx and lynx habitat. In particular, the Glacier project would create unsuitable habitat and would fragment the connectivity between suitable lynx habitat in the BWCAW, which is considered a lynx refugia. In addition, the new roads and new winter trails would result in compacted travel surfaces, and could result in illegal use of closed roads and increased competition.

Non-Native Invasive Species

The public expressed a concern that harvest and related road activities have the potential to increase the risk and the spread of non-native invasive species, in particular, into the BWCAW and on some rock outcrop sites.

Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Areas

Harvest and associated road activities have the potential to impact Forest Plan inventoried Roadless areas, which could adversely impact the Roadless characteristics of the areas.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

This section describes the No-action Alternative and the two action alternatives to be analyzed in detail in the EIS. Each alternative description provides a brief summary of the management emphasis for the alternative and a more detailed description of the activities that would be implemented under the alternative.

ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE)

Alternative 1 would result in no timber management, planting, fuel reductions, or road projects in the Project Area at this time. No changes would occur in roads that are open or closed. Gravel pit use

would continue on a case-by-case basis. New requests for access across federal land from private landowners would not be granted at this time, although they may be analyzed separately in the future. Alternative 1 is the baseline for comparison of the action alternatives.

Alternative 2, Modified Proposed Action

The modified proposed action was developed based on the proposed action that was included in the Scoping Report and incorporates comments from the public and additional field information. The modified proposed action would implement the Forest Plan, including moving the vegetation conditions towards the desired landscape ecosystem objectives for age class, species composition and management indicator habitats and follows all of the standards and guidelines. See Alternative 2, Map 1 and 2 for locations of activities included in this alternative.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 was developed to address the significant issues raised by the public during the Scoping comment period. The Responsible Official directed the interdisciplinary team to develop an alternative that would not harvest or build roads directly adjacent to the BWCAW and would not harvest in an area perceived to be at higher risk from non-native invasive species. Therefore, harvest units in these areas were dropped. The team also identified an opportunity to harvest other units that were included in the Scoping Report Proposed Action and are not adjacent to the BWCAW. These units are included in Alternative 3 because they offer an opportunity to meet objectives for increasing the amount of jack pine in the Project Area. See Alternative 3, Maps 3 and 4 for locations of activities included in this alternative.

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